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The Minorities and the Iraqi State

641 The Iraqi Government has on the whole tried to be correct
563 in its dealings with the minorities. There are usually one or two Kurds in each Cabinet and there have been one Jewish and one Christian Minister; the minorities have a share, although perhaps an inadequate one, in government and army appointments, and in government subsidies to schools. Apart from the Assyrian incidents of 1933, the peculiar circumstances of which are explained below, and the Baghdad pogrom of 1941, at a time when government had practically ceased to function, there has been no physical persecution of minorities. Nevertheless, they are all restless and apprehensive, and have not yet come to regard themselves, nor are they regarded by others, as full and loyal citizens of the Iraqi State.

The explanation for this is not to be found in the bad will either of majority or of minorities. Its fundamental cause is to be looked for in the amorphous nature of the State. Iraq was created artificially by joining together three Ottoman provinces. It is too large to have the natural unity which each of those provinces possesses by itself, too small to have the unity of the Fertile Crescent or Arab Asia as a whole. It has not yet acquired a unity or structure of its own, and cannot do so until two fundamental questions are faced and answered: first, what are to be the relations between Sunnis and Shi'is in Iraq; secondly, what is to be the relation of Iraq to the rest of the Arab world?

The first is perhaps the most important of all questions for the future of the country. There are more Sunnis than Shi'is in Iraq as a whole, but the Sunnis are divided into Kurds and Arabs, so that the Shi'is form the largest single community. Nevertheless, they have less than their due share in the Government, mainly because there are fewer men of education among them than among the Sunnis. Thus they are discontented, and the political balance between them and the Sunnis is very precarious.

641 There are to-day two political tendencies in Iraq, based upon
563 two possible solutions of this fundamental problem. Many
668 Iraqis, mainly among the Sunni Arabs, advocate the incorporation of Iraq into an Arab State or federation, in the hope that this will ease the local situation: the Shi'is will be in a minority in the large Arab State, and in course of time will come to look upon themselves as Arabs rather than as Shi'is. The other tendency, which has many adherents among the Shi'is, is towards the

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development of an Iraqi nationalism, regarding all Iraqis without distinction as equal citizens of the State.

These two tendencies are not necessarily opposed to one another except in their extreme forms. A Pan-Arab would generally concede the value of local feeling provided it is kept in its proper place; an Iraqi nationalist would not oppose Iraq's membership of the Arab League. They differ not in essence so much as in emphasis. This difference, however, is important; and it is clear that the future of the minorities will be greatly affected by which of them prevails. If the exclusive Iraqi nationalism prevails, the way will be open for all minorities to become full citizens, although this will not save them from the necessity of at least some degree of assimilation. If Pan-Arab sentiment prevails, then a serious Kurdish problem may arise; and a Christian problem as well if Pan-Arabism is not dissociated from Islamic feeling.

The Kurds: Description

The Kurds form a compact community with a local majority in the north and north-east of Iraq. Most of them are concentrated in the liwas of Mosul, Irbil, Kirkuk, Sulaimania and Diala. The regions which they inhabit are largely mountainous, and a great proportion of them are nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoral tribesmen, pasturing sheep, goats and other animals, moving up the mountains in the summer and down again in the cool weather. Others of them, however, are farmers in the plains and valleys, who cultivate wheat, fruit, rice and tobacco; not all the farmers however are wholly settled, some of them being semi-sedentary.

Most of the Kurds are Sunni Moslems, although a minority belong to extreme Shi'i sects. Again, most of them preserve their Kurdish language and customs, although in certain districts they are bi-lingual and a few tribes are in process of being Arabized. Their language is not unified so much as a group of dialects, some of which differ partly from one another. Similarly, they themselves do not form a single community but a group of tribes. Among the wholly settled Kurds the tribal organization is becoming weaker, but in the mountains it is still very strong, and in general it is true to say that tribal loyalty is stronger than any other. The tribesmen, like most mountain peoples, are restless under civil government and positive law. They willingly

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the Acting High Commissioner and the Acting Prime Minister visited Kurdistan together, and made statements in which, while condemning separation and emphasizing the unity of Iraq, they spoke of the Government's resolve to satisfy the linguistic and other demands of the Kurds. On the other hand, a number of conciliatory measures, both legislative and administrative, were taken. The most important of them was the Local Languages Law already mentioned.

In spite of this, revolt once more broke out among the Kurds, first under Shaikh Mahmud (1930–1) and then under Shaikh Ahmad of Barzan (1932). The causes of these revolts were partly political and partly personal. They were only subdued through the intervention of the R.A.F.

The Kurds since the Treaty

From 1932 to 1943 the Kurds did not revolt again, but continued to be restless and unwilling to accept the authority of the Government. There were two main reasons for their restlessness. The first was the growth of Kurdish national spirit, due partly to the gradual appearance of a class of educated Kurds, partly to a natural reaction against Pan-Arabism. The encouragement given by the French to Kurdish nationalism in the Syrian Jazirah, and by the Russians to Kurdish autonomy in the Caucasus, may also have had a certain although a limited influence. The second and more fundamental reason was to be found in the particular administrative grievances of the Kurdish tribes. The Iraqi Government made little attempt to carry out the provisions of the various laws passed during the mandatory period. Government departments in Baghdad tended to neglect the claims of districts so far away from the capital; and the Kurds had no way of making their voice heard effectively and compelling the Government to pay attention to their needs. In general, Arab officials in the northern provinces failed to understand the mentality and needs of the Kurdish people (although Kurdish officials in Arab districts were often highly successful). The gap between administration and inhabitants was perhaps greatest in the Mosul liwa, where the administration was largely under the influence of the Arab townspeople of Mosul itself.

The Government's neglect showed itself in every sphere. There were few facilities for education, and those which existed were mainly for education in Arabic. Again, nothing was done

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to extend and improve the cultivation of the land and raise the standard of living. This had serious consequences when the war came and brought with it urgent economic problems. The mountain districts did not produce enough cereals to feed the population, and importation on an adequate scale was rendered difficult by the poverty of the Kurdish peasants, the lack of a food-supply organization and the insufficiency of transport. The sense of grievance was further stimulated by the example of the Kurds in Persia, who had thrown off the authority of the Persian Government since the Allied occupation of 1941. In 1943 Mulla Mustafa, the brother of Shaikh Ahmad, rose in revolt in the Barzan district. His rising lasted for several months. Attempts to suppress it failed and it was finally called off after negotiations, and an undertaking by the Government to look into Kurdish grievances. Majid Mustafa himself a Kurd and a distinguished administrator, was appointed Minister without Portfolio with the special duty of devoting himself to Kurdish affairs. His report outlined a scheme of economic and administrative reforms. In the course of 1944 little was done to carry out these or any reforms, and Mulla Mustafa's movement still smouldered; the condition of the Kurds was somewhat improved, however, by the increased cultivation of tobacco, their most important cash-crop.

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The Assyrians

The Assyrians form a distinct community, not only by reason of their Nestorian faith, but also through their language, a Syriac dialect, and their traditions. They are probably the descendants of tribes which moved from the plains of Iraq into the mountains to the north during the period of the Mongol invasion, and remained there until the present generation. In their mountain-home they lived as shepherds, feudally organized under their *maliks* with their Patriarch, the Mar Shimun, as their temporal as well as spiritual ruler. They paid a yearly tribute to the Ottoman Sultan, but were in practice autonomous, although their autonomy was always subject to interference by their neighbours the Kurds.

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At the beginning of the First World War they were divided into three main groups: first, the mountaineers in the Hakkiari district of what is now Turkey; secondly, those in the plains to the west of Lake Urmiyah, in Persia; and, thirdly those in the

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563 economically dependent on the British. Quite apart from the economic dangers of this, there were signs that they once more hoped for autonomy under British protection. The danger of such hopes is too obvious to need explanation.

The Other Christians

563 195 Apart from the Assyrians, the Christians in Iraq are mainly Chaldaeans, Syrian Orthodox and Catholics, and Armenian Orthodox and Catholics, with smaller numbers of Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics and other Uniates, and Protestants. The communities are recognized by the Government as possessing competence in matters of personal status and other internal affairs.

563 369 871 Here, as in the other countries, the Christians are more fully an urban community than the Moslems, and show a peculiar aptitude for commerce, crafts and he professions; but there is also a large peasant community, Chaldaean, Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic, in the plains around Mosul. In Iraq, as elsewhere, the proportion of educated Christians is higher than that of educated Moslems, and they are further advanced on the road to Westernization, thanks to the work of foreign missions and schools.

563 The Armenians are a trading community in the towns. They preserve their language and traditions carefully, but they are too few to be able to avoid some measure of external assimilation. The other Christians are partly Syriac-speaking, partly Arabic. This cannot, however, be regarded as a sharp distinction, since the language used depends upon the environment in which they are living, and many of them are bi-lingual. In general, it is true that those whose native language is now Arabic spoke Syriac until recent generations, and that with few exceptions they are not conscious of belonging to the Arab nation.

563 In spite of efforts to spread the conception of a 'Syriac' people, the general tendency among the Christians is towards at least a superficial Arabization. This raises the question of their relation towards the Arab nationalist movement. So far, they have regarded it with fear and hostility, apart from some individuals who have supported it with enthusiasm. The nationalists too have tended to suspect them, although the existence of the much greater Kurdish and Shi'i problems has diverted attention from them. What the future relationship will be depends very

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563 largely on the line of development which the nationalist move-
668 ment takes.

The Jews

563 The organization of the Jewish community is regulated by a law passed in 1931, which laid down the composition and functions of the various institutions of the three communities of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra. (A fourth community, that of Diala, was added in 1932.) Through these institutions the communities possess self-government in their own affairs.

The majority of Jews in Iraq are Arabic-speaking and belong to families which have been settled in the country for hundreds or even thousands of years. They live mainly in the large towns, in the economic life of which they have a large part. They are manufacturers, merchants, financiers, and follow the free professions. Their influence is particularly great in Baghdad. In the north of the country Kurdish-speaking Jews are to be found; they are mainly traders and craftsmen in the Kurdish towns, but a number of Jewish agricultural villages exist in the Amadia district.

Their communal life is highly organized. There is a large number of Jewish schools, some of them subsidized by the Government, and many of them reaching a comparatively high standard. There is a class of highly cultivated and Westernized Jews.

There is no open and official discrimination against them. Individual Jews are to be found in Parliament, the Civil Service and the Army; the first and greatest Minister of Finance, Sassoon Heskail, was a Jew. There is, however, a considerable hostility towards them, because of traditional religious hatred and their economic power. This has increased greatly in recent years as a natural consequence of Arab opposition to Zionism. It is true that the Iraqi Jews, like the Oriental Jews, are for the most part not Zionists by conviction; some of them indeed profess to be Arab nationalists and are hostile to Zionism. It is inevitable, however, that some of the hostility which Arabs feel for Jewish designs on Palestine should be directed to the Jews in their midst. The growing hostility showed itself most clearly in the incidents which followed the collapse of Rashid Ali's movement in Baghdad in 1941. In the past few years, many Iraqi Jews, aware that their future in Iraq is dark, have emigrated to Palestine and America in search of greater security or opportunity.